# LIFE OF PRESIDENT DAVIS AS TOLD IN HIS OWN WORDS

PRESIDENT JEFFERSON DAVIS.

OLD STATE CAPITOL IN WHICH CONFEDERATE CONGRESS SAT.

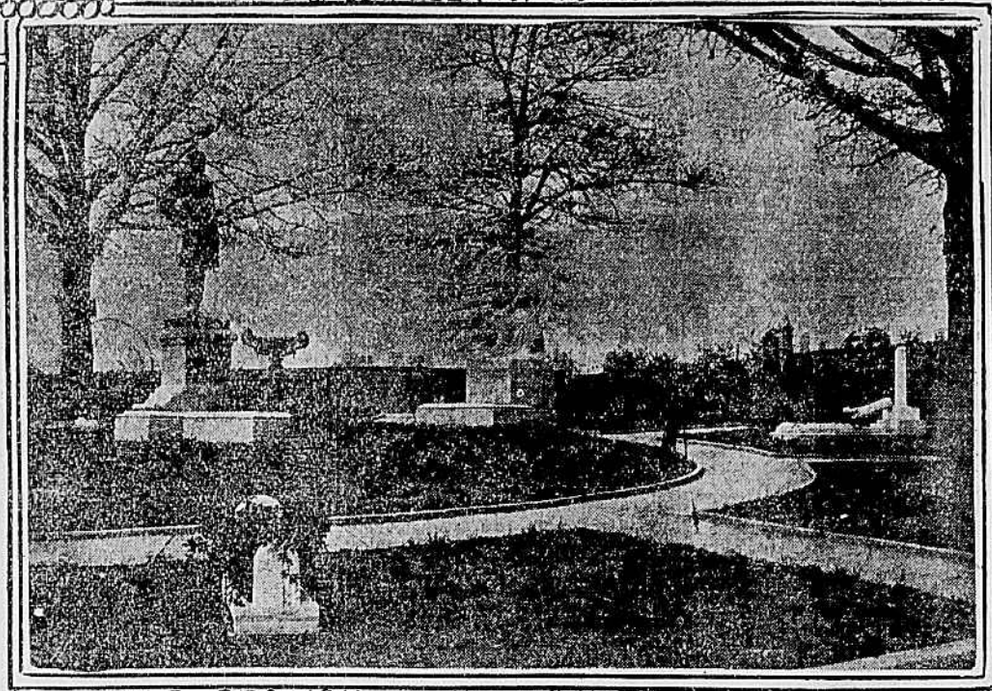
MRS. JEFFERSON DAVIS

MISS WINNIE DAVIS.

WHITE HOUSE OF CONFEDERACY NOW CONFEDERATE MUSEUM.

OLD ST. PAUL'S CHURCH WHERE PRESIDENT DAVIS WORSHIPED

MRS. J. A. HAYES
DAUGHTER OF PRESIDENT DAVIS AND HER TWO SONS, WHO WILL UNVAIL MONUMENT TOMORROW.



DAVIS SECTION IN HOLLYWOOD C.

(Written in November, 1889.)

I was born June 3, 1808, in Christian county, Ky., in that part of it which, by a subsequent division, is now in Todd county. At this place has since arisen the village of Fairview, and on the exact spot where I was born has been constructed the Baptist church of the place. My father, Samuel Davis, was a native of Georgia, and served in the War of the Revolution first in the "mounted gun men" and afterwards as captain of infantry at the siege of Savannah. During my infancy my father removed to Wilkinson county, Miss. After passing through the county academy, I entered Transvaal College, Kentucky, at the age of sixteen, and was advanced as far as the senior class, when I was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point, which I entered in September, 1824. I graduated in 1828, and then, in accordance with the custom of cadets, entered active service with the rank of lieutenant, serving as an officer of infantry on the Northwest frontier until 1833, when a regiment of dragoons having been created, I was transferred to it. After a successful campaign against the Indians, I resigned from the army in 1835, being anxious to fulfil a long-existing engagement with a daughter of Col. Zachary Taylor, whom I married, not "after a romantic elopement," as has so often been stated, but at the house of her aunt and in the presence of many of her relatives, at a place near Louisville, Ky. Then I became a cotton planter in Warren county, Miss. It was my misfortune early in my married life to lose my wife, and for many years thereafter I lived in great seclusion on the plantation in the swamps of the Mississippi. In 1843 I for the first time took part in the political life of the country. Next year I was chosen one of the presidential electors at large of the State, and in the succeeding year was elected to Congress, taking my seat in the House of Representatives in December, 1845. The proposition to terminate the joint occupancy of Oregon and the reformation of the tariff were the two questions arousing most public attention at that time, and I took an active part in their discussion, especially in that of the first.

**War With Mexico.**

During this period hostilities with Mexico commenced, and in the legislation which the contest rendered necessary my military education enabled me to take a somewhat prominent part.

In June, 1846, a regiment of Mississippi volunteers was organized at Vicksburg, of which I was elected colonel. On receiving notice of the election I proceeded to overtake the regiment, which was already on its way to Mexico, and joined it at New Orleans. Reporting to General Taylor, then commanding at Camargo, my regiment, although the last to arrive—having been detained for some time on duty at the mouth of the Rio Grande—was selected to move with the advance upon the city of Monterey. The want of transportation prevented General Taylor from taking the whole body of volunteers who had reported there for duty. The Mississippi regiment was armed entirely with percussion rifles. And here it may be interesting to state that General Scott in Washington endeavored to persuade me not to take more rifles than enough for four companies, and objected particularly to percussion arms as not having been sufficiently tested for the use of troops in the field. Knowing that the Mississippians would have no confidence in the old flintlock muskets, I insisted on their being armed with the kind of rifle then recently made at New Haven, Conn.—the Whitney rifle. From having been first used by the Mississippians, these rifles have always been known as the Mississippi rifles.

In the attack on Monterey, General Taylor divided his force, sending one part of it by a circuitous road to attack the city from the west, while he decided to lead in person the attack on the east. The Mississippi regiment advanced to the relief of a force which had attacked Fort Lanaria, but had been repulsed before the Mississippians arrived. They carried the redoubt, and the fort, which was in the rear of it, surrendered. The next day our force on the west side carried successfully the height on which stood the bishop's palace, which commanded the city.

On the third day the Mississippians advanced from the fort which they held through lanes and gardens, skirmishing and driving the enemy before them, until they reached a two-story house at the corner of the Grand Plaza. Here they were joined by a regiment of Texans, and from the windows of this house they opened fire on the artillery and such other troops as were in view. But to get a better position for firing on the principal building of the Grand Plaza it was necessary to cross the street, which was swept by canister and grape, rattling on the pavement like hail; and as the street was very narrow, it was determined to construct a flying barricade. Some long timbers were found, and with pack saddles and boxes, which served the purpose, a barricade was constructed.

**Striking Incident.**

Here occurred an incident to which I have since frequently referred with pride. In breaking open a quartermaster's storehouse to get supplies for this barricade the men found bundles of the much-prized Mexican blankets, and also of very serviceable shoes and pack saddles. The pack saddles were freely taken as good material for the proposed barricade; and one of my men, as his shoes were broken and stones had hurt his feet, asked my permission to take a pair from one of the boxes. This, of course, was freely accorded, but not one of the very valuable and much-prized Mexican blankets was taken.

About the time that the flying barricade was completed arrangements were made by the Texans and Mississippians to occupy houses on both sides of the street for the purpose of more effective fire into the Grand Plaza. It having been deemed necessary to increase our force, the Mississippi sergeant-major was sent back for some companies of the First Mississippi, which had remained behind. He returned with the statement that the enemy was behind us, that all our troops had been withdrawn, and that orders had been three times sent to me to return. Governor Henderson, of Texas, had accompanied the Texan troops, and on submitting to him the question what we should do under the message, he realized, as was very plain, that it was safer to remain where we were than (our supports having been withdrawn) to return across streets, where we were liable to be fired on by artillery, and across open grounds, where cavalry might be expected to attack us. But he added that he supposed the orders came from the general in chief, and we were bound to obey them. So we made dispositions to retire quietly; but in passing the first square we found that our movement had been anticipated, and that a battery of artillery was posted to command the street. The arrangement made by me for crossing it was that I should go first; if only one gun was fired at me, then another man should follow; and so on, another and another, until a volley should be fired, and then all of them should rush rapidly across before the guns could be reloaded. In this manner the men got across with little loss. We then made our way to the suburb, where we found that an officer of infantry with two companies and a section of artillery had been posted to wait for us, and, in case of emergency, to aid our retreat.

**Asked For Conference.**

Early next morning General Ampudia, commanding the Mexican force, sent in a flag and asked for a conference with a view to capitulation. General Taylor acceded to the proposition, and appointed General Worth, Governor Henderson and myself commissioners to arrange the terms of capitulation. General Taylor received the city of Monterey, with supplies much needed by his army and shelter for the wounded. The enemy gained only the privilege of retiring peacefully—a privilege which, if it had been accorded, they had the power to take by any one of the three roads open to them. The point beyond which they should withdraw was fixed by the terms of capitulation, and the time during which hostilities were to be suspended was determined on by the length of time necessary to refer to and receive answers from the two governments. A few days before the expiration of the time so fixed the government of the United States disapproved of the capitulation, and ordered the truce to be immediately terminated. By this decision we lost whatever credit had been given to us for generous terms in the capitulation, and hostilities were to be resumed without any preparations having been made to enable General Taylor, even with the small force he had, to advance farther into the enemy's country. General Taylor's letter to Mr. Marcy, Secretary of War, was a very good response to an unjust criticism; and in the Washington Union of that time I also published a very full explanation of the acts of the commissioners and of the military questions involved in the matter of capitulation in preference to continuing the siege and attack.

**Prepared For Campaign.**

General Taylor, assuing that it was intended for him to advance into the interior of Mexico, then commenced to prepare himself for such a campaign. To this end he made requisitions for the needful transportation, as well as munitions, including, among other supplies, large India rubber bags in which to carry provisions for days, and which, being emptied before we reached the desert of sixty miles, would, by being filled with water, enable his troops and horses to cross those desert plains. These and other details had been entered into under the expectation that the censure of the treaty of Monterey meant a march into the interior of Mexico. Another thing required was a new battery of field pieces to take the place of the old Ringgold Battery, which by long service had become honeycombed. When all these arrangements were nearly completed it was decided to send General Scott with discretionary power, which enabled him to take nearly all the tried troops General Taylor had, including even the engineer then employed in the construction of a fort, and the battery of new guns to replace the old ones, which were deemed no longer safe, but which, under the intrepid Captain Bragg, afterwards did good service in the battle of Buena Vista.

General Taylor, with the main body of his army, went to Victoria, and there made arrangements to send them all to report to General Scott at Vera Cruz except the small force he considered himself entitled to as an escort on his route back to Monterey through an unfriendly people. That escort consisted of a battery of light artillery, a squadron of dragoons and a regiment of Mississippi riflemen. With these he proceeded through Monterey and Saltillo to Agua Nueva, where he was joined by the division of General Wool, who had made the campaign of Chihuahua.

**San a Anne Advances.**

General Santa Anna, commanding the army of Mexico, was informed of the action which had been taken in stripping General Taylor of his forces, and was also informed that he had at Saltillo only a handful of volunteers, which could be easily dispersed on the approach of an army. Thus assured, and with the prospect of recovering all the country down to the Rio Grande, Santa Anna advanced upon Agua Nueva.

General Taylor retired to the Angostura Pass, in front of the Hacienda of Buena Vista, and there made his dispositions to receive the anticipated attack. As sage as he was brave, his dispositions were made as well as the small force at his command made it possible. After two days of bloody fighting, Santa Anna retired before this little force, the greater part of which had never before been under fire.

The encounter with the enemy was very bloody. The Mississippians lost many of their best men, for each of whom, however, they slew several of the enemy. For, trained marksmen, they never touched the trigger without having an object through both sights, and they seldom fired without drawing blood. The infantry against whom the advance was made was driven back; but the cavalry then moved to get in the rear of the Mississippians, and this involved the necessity of falling back to where the plain was narrow, so as to have a ravine on each flank.

In this position the second demonstration of the enemy's cavalry was received. They were repulsed, and it was quiet in front of the Mississippians until an aid came and called from the other side of the ravine, which he could not pass, that General Taylor wanted support to come as soon as possible for the protection of the artillery on the right flank. The order was promptly obeyed at double-quick, although the distance must have been nearly a mile. They found the enemy moving in three lines upon the batteries of Capt. Braxton Bragg and the section of artillery commanded by George H. Thomas. The Mississippians came up in line, their right flank opposite the first line of the advancing enemy, and at a very short range opened fire. All being sharpshooters, those toward the left of the line obliqued to the right, and at close quarters and against three long lines, very few shots could have missed. At the same time the guns of Bragg and Thomas were firing grape. The effect was decisive; the infantry and artillery of the enemy immediately retired.

**No Enemy in Front.**

At the close of the day Santa Anna bugled the retreat, as was supposed, to go into quarters; but when the next sun rose there was no enemy in our front.

The news of this victory was received in the United States with a degree of enthusiasm proportionate to the small means with which it was achieved, and generosity was excited by the feeling that General Taylor had been treated with injustice. Thenceforward the march of "Old Rough and Ready" to the White House was a foregone conclusion.

In this battle, while advancing to meet the enemy, then pressing some of our discomfited volunteers on the left of the field of battle, I received a painful wound, which was rendered more severe in consequence of remaining in the saddle all day, although wounded early in the morning. A ball had passed through the foot, leaving in the wound broken bones and foreign matter, which the delay had made it impossible then to extract. In consequence I had to return home on crutches.

In the meantime a Senator of Mississippi had died, and the Governor had appointed me his successor. Before my return home President Polk had also appointed me brigadier-general of volunteers, an appointment which I declined on the ground that volunteers are militia, and that the Constitution reserved to the State the appointment of all militia officers. This was in 1847. In January, 1848, the Mississippi Legislature unanimously elected me United States Senator for the rest of the unexpired term, and in 1850 I was re-elected for the full term as my own successor. In the United States Senate I was chairman of the Military Committee, and I also took an active part in the debates on the compromise measures of 1850, frequently opposing Senator Douglas, of Illinois, in his theory of squatter sovereignty, and advocating, as a means of pacification, the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. When the question was presented to Mississippi as to whether the State should acquiesce in the compromise legislation of 1850, or whether it should join the other Southern States in a convention to decide as to the best course to pursue in view of the threatened usurpations of the Federal government, I advocated a convention of the Southern States with a view to such co-operation as might effectually check the exercise of constructive powers, the parent of despotism, by the Federal government.

**Canvass For Governor.**

The canvass for Governor commenced that year. The candidate of the Democratic party was by his opponents represented to hold extreme opinions—in other words, to be a disunionist. For, although he was a man of high character and had served the country well in peace and war, this supposition was so artfully cultivated that, though the Democratic party was estimated to be about eight thousand in majority, when the election occurred in September the Democratic candidates for a convention were defeated by a majority of over seven thousand, and the Democratic candidate for Governor withdrew.

The election for Governor was to occur in November, and I was called on to take the place vacated by the candidate who had withdrawn from the canvass. It was a forlorn hope, especially as my healt hhad been impaired especially as my health had been impaired, and there was not time before the approaching election to make such a canvass as would be needed to reform the ranks of the Democracy. However, as a duty to the party, I accepted the position, and made as active a campaign as time permitted, with the result that the majority against the party was reduced to less than one thousand. From this time I remained engaged in quiet farm labors until the nomination of Franklin Pierce, when I went out to advocate his election, having formed a very high opinion of him as a statesman and a patriot from observations of him in 1837 and 1838 when he was in the United States Senate. On his election as President I became a member of his Cabinet, filling the office of Secretary of War during his entire term.

**Work In Senate.**

During these four years I proposed the introduction of camels for service on the Western plains, a suggestion which was adopted. I also introduced an improved system of infantry tactics, effected the substitution of iron for wood in gun carriages, secured rifled muskets and rifles and the use of Minie balls, and advocated the increase of the defenses of the seacoast by heavy guns and the use of large-grain powder.

While in the Senate I had advocated, as a military necessity and as a means of preserving the Pacific Territory to the Union, the construction of a military railway across the continent, and as Secretary of War I was put in charge of the surveys of the various routes proposed. Perhaps for a similar reason—my previous action in the Senate—I was also put in charge of the extension of the United States Capitol.

The administration of Mr. Pierce presents the single instance of an executive whose Cabinet witnessed no change of persons during the whole term. At its close, having been re-elected to the United States Senate, I re-entered that body.

During the discussion of the compromise measures of 1850, the refusal to extend the Missouri compromise line to the Pacific was early put on the ground that there was no constitutional authority to legislate slavery into or out of any territory, which was in fact and seeming intent a repudiation of the Missouri compromise, and it was so treated in the Kansas-Nebraska bill.

**Party Divided.**

Subsequently Mr. Douglas, the advocate of what was called squatter sovereignty, insisted upon the rights of the first immigrants into the territory to decide upon the question whether migrating citizens might take their slaves with them, which meant, if it meant anything, that Congress could authorize a few settlers to do what it was admitted Congress itself could not do. But out of this bill arose a dissension which finally divided the Democratic party and caused its defeat in the presidential election of 1860. And from this empty, baseless theory grew the Illad of our direst woes.

When Congress met in the fall of

(Continued on Seventh Page.)